

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

---

WHAT IS *ICTERUS GUALANENSIS* UNDERWOOD?

BY OUTRAM BANGS.

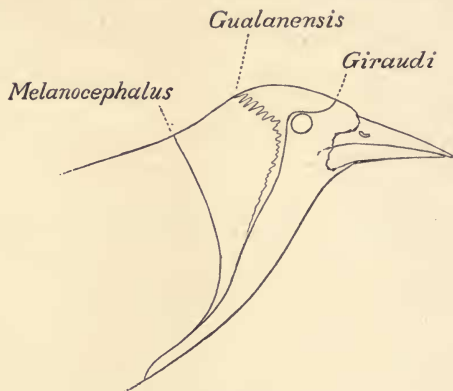
---

Being anxious to learn the real affinities of *Icterus gualanensis* Underwood, E. W. Nelson and I sent to G. S. Miller, Jr., while he was in the British Museum last spring, examples of *Icterus gairaudii* and *I. melanocephalus* in various stages of plumage, and asked him to compare them critically with Underwood's type preserved in that great institution. Miller promptly returned us a long account of the type together with the result of his comparison and from these it appears that *I. gualanensis* is either a distinct and very local species or rather more probably one of those strange abnormalities that occasionally occur among birds.

The whole case may be briefly summed up as follows: *Icterus gualanensis* was described by Underwood from an adult specimen collected by himself at Gualan, Guatemala (Bull. Brit. Orn. Club, No. LV, p. LIX, June 30, 1898). It proves on comparison of a large amount of material (by Miller) to be of the same shade of yellow—cadmium yellow—as *I. gairaudii*, thus differing from the only other species it needs comparison with—*I. melanocephalus*—which has the yellow of upperparts dull saffron or wax yellow and the underparts lemon or gamboge. It exactly matches adult examples of *I. gairaudii* in all other respects, as well as color, except in having the black of the head (which

ends with the forehead in *I. giraudii*) extended back to beyond the eye, where it ends in a broken line. In *I. melanocephalus* the whole head down to the upper part of the neck is black.

The accompanying drawing from a sketch made by Miller shows the distribution of black upon the head in the three species.



The measurements of the type are well within the extremes of those of *Icterus giraudii*, which varies considerably in size throughout its extensive range. They show the bird to have been larger with a larger bill than the maximum size reached by *I. melanocephalus*, and altogether larger than *Icterus prothemelas*, the young of which Ridgway suggests (Birds of N. and Mid. Am., Part II, p. 295, footnote, and in synonymy of *I. prothemelas*, with a query, p. 271.) *I. gualanensis* might possibly be.

Therefore, *Icterus gualanensis* is, so to speak, an example of *I. giraudii* perfectly typical in every respect except in having the black of head extending somewhat farther back. It comes from a region almost in the middle of the range of *I. giraudii*, so that it can hardly be a geographical form of that species, and the chances seem strongly in favor of its being a "freak." Unfortunately, however, this can not be considered as proved, and *I. gualanensis* must take its place among the number of "species" of tropical American birds that rest on the strength of a single peculiar individual. Cases of this sort are not uncommon among the humming birds and Hartert's method of treating them in his Trochilidæ\* seems to me the best that could be

\* Das Tierreich, Berlin, 1900.

devised. He includes and describes each under the genus to which it belongs, but gives it no number. Thus all can be found in his review, and their supposed characters studied, but their inclusion does not augment the number of recognizable species in the genus or the family.

Many other instances of the kind occur in other groups of birds; a very striking case being in the genus *Ramphocelus*, where *R. chrysopterus* Boucard, *R. inexpectatus* Rothsch., *R. dunstalli* Rothsch. and *R. festæ* Salvadori, all from Panama, and *R. uropygialis* Bonap. from Guatemala, rest each on the strength of a single peculiar individual. Panama has been so thoroughly overhauled and its tanagers collected in such series, that surely if any of these four supposed species were other than "freaks" or hybrids, additional examples must have turned up.